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Youth Employment Programs: Three Southwestern Case Studies

Abstract

"An examination of the planning, implementation, and first year operation phases of the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 (YEDPA) by three prime sponsors in the Southwest: the city of Albuquerque, NM (and surrounding Bernalillo County), the Coastal Bend manpower consortium of Texas, and the city and county of El Paso, TX."

Keywords

employment, program, youth, case studies, Texas, New Mexico, Mexico, job, CETA, YEDP A, employment, immigrant, immigration, work, labor, market

Comments

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Youth Employment Programs

Three Southwestern Case Studies

Vernon M. Briggs, Jr.

With the signing of the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 (YEDPA) on August 5, 1977, a national decision to spend substantial sums and to encourage a variety of program initiatives directed at the employment needs of youth was codified into law. The legislation was a series of amendments to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 and was implemented through the CETA system of local prime sponsors.

The planning, implementation, and first-year operational phases of YEDPA by three prime sponsors in the Southwest will be presented in this article. The prime sponsors are the city of Albuquerque and the encompassing county of Bernalillo, New Mexico; the Coastal Bend manpower consortium area in Texas (administered by the city of Corpus Christi and twelve additional counties, most of which are rural); and the city and county of El Paso, Texas. Although widely separated in their geographic locations and significantly diverse in their industrial compositions, the three areas have several common characteristics. All have large minority-group populations (mostly Hispanics); all have large youth populations; all are characterized as generally low-wage labor markets; all are largely nonunion areas; and all have serious poverty and unemployment problems. As wages are low and employment opportunities are limited for adult workers, adults and youths are in more direct competition in these local labor markets than is generally the case elsewhere in the nation. It is true, however, that the aggregate unemployment rate did decline in all three labor markets during the first year of YEDPA's operation. Only in El Paso did the aggregate unemployment rate remain substantially higher than the national rate.

A summary of the key descriptors of the population and economic characteristics for the chosen prime sponsors is presented in table 1. In each locality, one city numerically dominates the service area. Albuquerque accounts for approximately 77 percent of the population of Bernalillo County; Corpus Christi, accounts for approximately 85 percent of Nueces County and 48 percent of the twelve-

county consortium; and El Paso accounts for 94 percent of El Paso County.

The Albuquerque labor market is dominated by the government sector. About 28 percent of the labor market is employed by various government agencies. Most of these workers are federal employees and are associated with various military installations and missile testing facilities, as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Federal Aviation Agency. Also, the University of New Mexico is located in the city. The private sector is composed largely of service industries. Both the manufacturing and construction industries are small in numbers and operational size.

The Coastal Bend area of Texas contains one major city, Corpus Christi, and an additional twelve counties. Aside from Nueces County, which contains Corpus Christi, the remaining counties are quite small in population (five had a population of fewer than 10,000 people in 1973). Five counties have lost population since 1970. The remainder have had slight population increases as a result of natural growth factors. The population of the area is increasing, but at a much lower rate than that of the state of Texas. The local economy is geared heavily toward retail and wholesale industries (partly reflective of the fact that Corpus Christi is a major seaport on the Gulf of Mexico). The trade sectors combine to account for 34 percent of all employment in the whole area. Personal services account for an additional 19 percent of employment. These low-wage and labor-intensive sectors are sustaining the greatest employment growth and, based on projected growth of tourism, will expand most rapidly in the future. Manufacturing, although accounting for 12 percent of total employment, is substantial only in Nueces County. Manufacturing is dominated by chemical and petroleum products. These enterprises tend to be highly capitalized operations that do not hold much prospect for employment expansion.

The El Paso labor market is heavily influenced by its location on the U.S.-Mexico border. It is not surprising that the retail and wholesale trade sector, which accounts for approximately 23 percent of total employment, would dominate the local labor market. Manufacturing makes up a large part of the local economy (about 18 percent of total

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employment), but this aggregate figure masks the fact that the low-wage textile industry accounts for half of all jobs in manufacturing. The government sector, as is the case all along the border, is a substantial provider of jobs—over 20 percent of all employed persons. Although the populations of the city and county are among the most rapidly growing in the state of Texas, the local labor market has not been able to provide a commensurate number of jobs. The presence of a substantial number of daily commuting workers and illegal aliens from Mexico in the work force contributes immensely to the prevailing low-wage structure and the shortage of jobs.

Thus, for different reasons, all three areas under study tend to be characterized as low-wage labor markets. All are sustaining some measure of growth, but all have serious employment and income problems. Each also has a population that has a very high proportion of minority-group members and a high proportion of people (both adults and youths) in need of manpower services.

As for the prime sponsors, table 2 contains their respective allocations for fiscal year 1978 and fiscal year 1979 for major CETA titles; table 3 presents the enrollment levels for fiscal year 1978 by each CETA title. In addition to these programs, both Albuquerque and the Coastal Bend have skill training improvement programs, and the Coastal Bend was the recipient of a substantial planning grant for the employment opportunity program (a welfare reform demonstration program) that could provide an additional 3,200 public service employment jobs if it becomes operational. In each of the communities, the prime sponsors and CETA are highly visible. In Albuquerque, the present mayor is a former director of the prime sponsor. Because of high poverty levels, more attention is given to CETA in

these communities by both the media and the local politicians than is normally the case.

Effects of the YEDPA Program

The prime sponsors in all three localities report that the net effect of YEDPA was a total addition of employment for youth in their localities. In Albuquerque, if the entitlement program is included, service to youth has clearly increased substantially over pre-YEDPA periods. Measuring the actual effect in any of the prime sponsor areas, however, is virtually impossible because the youth employment and training program (YETP) and the youth community conservation and improvement project (YCCIP) were essentially in operation for only two quarters of 1978 (April 1–September 30, 1978). Many youth programs began in March 1978, but most were not fully operational until April 1978. A few did not begin until the summer of 1978, when others were phasing out. The first quarter of 1979 was a lost quarter because of uncertainty about CETA reauthorizations and delay in re-funding. Hence, a study of quarterly data reports cannot provide any meaningful measures of the aggregate effect of YEDPA.

Job Quality

Generalizations about job quality are difficult. Given the types of jobs involved, much of the quality depends upon the adequacy of the supervision. Impressions based upon a number of on-site visits and interviews with participants and supervisors did suggest several trends, however.

The quality of jobs being provided to participants in the youth employment and training program is much better

Table 1

Selected Population Characteristics for Three Southwestern Prime Sponsors

Prime sponsor	Population 1978	Population growth rate since 1970	Percentage of population with Spanish sur- names, 1970	Percentage of population who are black, 1970	Percentage of population who are native Ameri- can, 1970	Number of people in need of manpower services* 1978	Civilian labor force October 1978	Unemploy- ment rate October 1978
Bernalillo County, N.M. (including city of Albu- querque)	384,200	21.7	39.0	2.1	1.8	85,000	196,700	5.8
Coastal Bend manpower consor- tium, Texas (in- cluding city of Corpus Christi)†	440,700	4.8	47.0	3.9	less than 0.5	75,000	182,305	4.6
El Paso County, Texas (including city of El Paso)	443,400	23.4	56.8	2.9	less than 0.5	100,444	164,800	8.2

*Includes estimates of unemployed, discouraged workers, involuntary part-time employed, and those employed full time but who have incomes below the poverty threshold.

†Consortium includes the following counties: Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio.

Source: All data, with one exception, are from U.S. Bureau of the Census or U.S. Department of Labor publications. The column that gives the number of people in need of manpower services was compiled from data supplied by the prime sponsors.

than that generally available to those enrolled in the youth community conservation and improvement project. Jobs in the latter tend to involve outdoors work (clean up and maintenance tasks) and tend to be similar in content. Thus, if the concern is whether work is being done that would not likely be done in the absence of the project, then the project is a success. If skill transferability is the concern, the project is not a success. In either case, work is being done, work habits are being learned, and income is being provided to youths who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The work is largely unskilled, and the quality of the jobs is generally low. Participants in the youth employment and training program, on the other hand, seem to be exposed to a much wider variety of jobs. Although the jobs also seem to be largely unskilled, the settings in which the participants work and the supportive services that they receive do seem to offer more exposure to opportunities to move up the job ladder. These participants are also more likely to be in jobs that are similar to those of some regular employees.

Much of the quality of these jobs depends upon the adequacy of the supervision. Adults are more likely to be supervisors in the youth employment and training program than in the youth community conservation and improvement project. In some instances, supervisors in the conservation and improvement project are older youths in the project. In the employment and training program, the supervisors are usually the same people who are in charge of regular employees.

Participants in the employment and training program are usually in jobs that mix them with regular employees, while participants in the community conservation and improvement project are usually working in separate projects that are specially created for them. Thus, there is no pretense in the latter project that the jobs have any direct long-run benefits to the participants.

The emphasis in both youth programs is on providing services and minor maintenance rather than creating permanent and tangible objects. By concentrating on intangible services, YEDPA is not able to build structures and monuments (such as those created by the Works Progress Administration of the

New Deal) that future generations will be able to point back to with pride. Although there is much interest at the local level in doing tangible work, the fear of union opposition and the lack of adequate parallel funds for capital materials and tools have largely precluded this option.

Effects on the Summer Program for Youth

Because of the large number of needy youths in all three areas, finding sufficient participants for all of the regular summer youth programs was no problem. In Albuquerque and El Paso, the youth community conservation and improvement project and the youth employment and training program were kept separate from summer enrollments under the existing CETA Title I and the summer program for economically disadvantaged youth (SPEDY) under Title III. In the Coastal Bend, the programs run by the school system were blended together.

In the Coastal Bend program, the original plan was to expend all of the youth employment and training program

Table 2

Total Allocations to Selected Prime Sponsors for CETA Titles I, II, III, and VI for Fiscal Year 1978 and Fiscal Year 1979
(In millions of dollars)

Prime sponsor	Fiscal year	Title I	Title II	Title III			Title VI
				SPEDY*	YCCIP†	YETP‡	
Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, New Mexico	1978	3.3	2.7	1.1	0.2	0.8	12.3
	1979	3.3	4.9	1.1	0.2	0.8	7.3
Coastal Bend manpower consortium, Texas	1978	3.7	1.8	1.5	0.1	0.8	8.0
	1979	3.8	3.9	1.4	0.2	0.8	4.3
City and County of El Paso, Texas	1978	3.3	2.0	1.2	0.2	1.2	11.9
	1979	3.7	6.3	n.a.	0.2	1.0	10.1

*SPEDY = Summer program for economically disadvantaged youth.

†YCCIP = Youth community conservation and improvement project.

‡YETP = Youth employment and training program.

Note: Albuquerque also received a tier II grant under the youth incentive entitlement pilot project of \$1,106,000 for the eighteen-month period of January 1978 through June 30, 1979, and an additional \$816,105 for July 1, 1979, through June 1, 1980.

Source: Region VI Office of U.S. Department of Labor.

Table 3

Total Enrollments for Selected Prime Sponsors for CETA Titles I, II, III, and VI for Fiscal Year 1978

Prime sponsor	Title I	Title II	Title III			Title VI
			SPEDY*	YCCIP†	YETP‡	
Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, New Mexico	3,117	540	1,524	91	472	2,212
Coastal Bend manpower consortium, Texas	1,987	349	2,000	79	897	2,432
City and County of El Paso, Texas	2,838	657	1,138	136	605	2,435

*SPEDY = Summer program for economically disadvantaged youth.

†YCCIP = Youth community conservation and improvement project.

‡YETP = Youth employment and training program.

Source: Region VI Office of U.S. Department of Labor.

funds in the first six months of 1978 and then to shift the participants into positions for the summer program for economically disadvantaged youth. Because of the late start of the youth employment and training program, however, there was considerable overlap into the summer. The combination of available funds for these two programs meant that total summer enrollments were considerably more than the planned level. As the youth employment and training program funds were depleted, the participants were transferred to the summer program for economically disadvantaged youth or Title I slots. The different income eligibility criteria for the summer program for economically disadvantaged youth and the youth employment and training program led to some administrative difficulties, but these were overcome. School officials strongly recommended that these income criteria be standardized.

The types of full-time jobs offered during the summer were uniformly the same as the types of part-time jobs provided during the school year. The federal minimum wage remained the standard for nearly everyone except those participants with some supervisory duties over other youths. Programs for out-of-school youths did tend to pay slightly higher wages.

Some minor problems occurred in localities in which the three youth programs coexisted during the summer months. In a few instances, youths tried to get two jobs. More importantly, some youths shifted from YEDPA jobs to summer program jobs. The reason was that the summer program for youths, for noneconomic reasons, offered some of the more attractive jobs. For instance, in El Paso the summer program for youths had a number of jobs in recreational occupations (such as life guards and supervisors of basketball programs). These efforts by those enrolled in the programs to shift between programs, however, were the exceptions.

In Albuquerque, the presence of an experimental youth incentive entitlement pilot project did cause fewer youths aged 16 and 17 to be available for the summer program for economically disadvantaged youth than had been the case in previous years. Accordingly, it also meant that the summer program was confronted with more youths aged 14 and 15 than it had been in earlier years. This development, however, enabled more youths than ever to be served.

None of the prime sponsors reported any indication of labor shortages in youth-dominated occupations during the summer months. All of the prime sponsors indicated that there were more youths in their communities than the sizable youth programs could accommodate. There were no reports of employers who complained about shortages of youthful job seekers, although some employers did complain about shortages of youths with job skills. These complaints, however, were considered to be unrelated to the youth programs.

Local Educational Agencies

The fact that YEDPA mandated that the local educational agencies receive at least 22 percent of the allocation

for the youth employment and training program caused no particular difficulties in the three prime sponsor areas. A few had qualms, however, that the schools were only interested in serving in-school youngsters. Also, some questioned the congruence of the evaluation criteria of the youth programs used by the prime sponsors (who are inclined to think in terms of job placement) and those used by school officials (who believe that the objectives are to keep people in classes).

The decisions as to whom to give the funds were relatively simple. Albuquerque has only one school system that covers the entire administrative area of the prime sponsor. The Coastal Bend area has almost fifty independent school systems, but several years ago the Corpus Christi Independent School District had agreed to contract for and administer all CETA youth programs for the area.

El Paso County has two large school systems and eight small rural districts. The largest districts are the El Paso Independent School District, which is the fifth largest system in Texas, and the Ysleta Independent School District, which is the seventh largest in Texas. The El Paso Independent School District has, in the past, served as the sponsor for all in-school manpower programs for the other school districts in the county. In the case of YEDPA, both of the large school systems received funding under the youth employment and training program, but they restricted their programs to their own school boundaries. The El Paso Independent School District also received substantial funding from the youth community conservation and improvement project for its own district.

The local educational agencies in each of the three prime sponsor areas operated three entirely different programs. Albuquerque initiated a special program with the local hospitality industry (motels, hotels, travel agencies, and the chamber of commerce) and used all of its funds for this endeavor. The Corpus Christi Independent School District expanded and enriched the comprehensive in-school and dropout prevention program that was already in existence. The El Paso independent schools introduced non-profit job sites. The Ysleta Independent School District introduced a teachers' aid program for school-age mothers that tried to teach day-care preparation. The El Paso Independent School District added a program at its vocational-technical school that sought placements in the private sector to lead eventually to possible permanent placements. All of the programs are directed at the economically disadvantaged.

The relations between the prime sponsors and the local educational agencies have been uniformly cooperative. The local educational agencies have been frustrated by the uncertainties and administrative requirements of YEDPA, but they realize that these matters are not the fault of the prime sponsors. Except for the Ysleta Independent School District, all the local educational agencies have had experience with CETA youth programs and have become accustomed to similar problems. The youth employment and training program does introduce a new set of problems, however, since it operates as a year-round in-school program. Funds must be synchronized to the school year

rather than the federal fiscal calendar if school employment and training programs are to become a permanent addition to CETA operations.

All of the local educational agencies provide academic credit for work experience and for the required classes that youth employment training program participants take. Academic credit for work experience was already available in Albuquerque but had not been available in Texas before YEDPA. Apparently, academic credit for work experience is still not possible in most circumstances in Texas schools except for those youths enrolled in YEDPA programs. In all instances, participants must receive some classroom instruction in work habits, job orientation, and self-assertiveness. In some instances, students do not have to take the classroom instruction every term, but they must during the first term in which they are enrolled in the program. The academic worthiness of the program is determined by the local school districts and their respective state educational agencies. The prime sponsors are not involved in the process and seem content to leave it that way. There does not seem to be any external monitoring of the YEDPA program. Although state educational agencies must give advance approval of the program, they do not seem to have an ongoing monitoring process.

Characteristics of the Participants

Given the ethnic composition of the local communities, it is not surprising that most participants in these programs have Hispanic backgrounds. Nevertheless, blacks have been given ample opportunities to participate in the Coastal Bend program. In Albuquerque, blacks have also been given special attention through a grant for a youth incentive entitlement pilot project. This project is a job-guarantee program for low-income youths who stay in school or return to school; it was placed in the part of Albuquerque where the black population is most concentrated. Other youth programs, in turn, do not serve that area of the city; hence, black participation in these other programs is understandably not high. In El Paso the low black participation rate reflects the fact that blacks constitute less than three percent of the local population.

The proportion of young women in the youth employment and training program is greater than that in the youth community conservation and improvement project in all three prime sponsor jurisdictions; in fact, more young women than young men participate in the youth employment training program. In the case of the youth community conservation and improvement project, the physical nature of the jobs may explain the smaller proportion of young women participants and the fact that many of the women who did participate also dropped out. The reason why more women than men participate in the employment and training program is less readily apparent. The variety of diverse projects and the multiple number of sponsors would make it seem unlikely that it was done by design. One explanation is that school systems, in which young women are well represented, are deeply involved in the operations of the program. Another explanation is that

several large ventures in the program involve training and work sites in occupational areas (such as secretarial training programs and day-care facilities, libraries, and hospitals) that have been traditionally dominated by women. Also, in El Paso, the YWCA operated a program in fiscal year 1978 that involved only young women. Similarly, both Albuquerque and El Paso sponsored programs in fiscal year 1979 for high school women who either were pregnant or were already mothers.

The youth community conservation and improvement projects have predominately enrolled youths under age 18—a fact that is somewhat surprising because the school systems were not involved in the project in Albuquerque or the Coastal Bend area. In El Paso, however, the school system administered a substantial portion of the project grant in fiscal year 1978. The youth employment and training program, on the other hand, has had a fairly equal representation of youths under 18 and youths over 18 both in Albuquerque and in the Coastal Bend area. Again, however, El Paso is clearly the exception; most of its youths in the employment training program are under 18.

Most of the participants are from economically disadvantaged families. Some were from families receiving aid for families with dependent children. While participation in these programs was not specifically restricted to the economically disadvantaged, the prime sponsors were asked to give preference to the economically disadvantaged. All of the prime sponsors have clearly complied.

The majority of the participants are in high school. The fact that the school systems are legislatively involved in the youth employment and training program naturally biases this program toward greater involvement of youths who are in school. To provide much in the way of opportunity for out-of-school youths who are under 18 might only serve to entice students to quit school. Designing adequate programs for out-of-school youths below age 18, therefore, remains a serious problem. Not surprisingly, then, only a small number of previously unemployed youths have participated in the programs. As most participants are in school, they come from the ranks of those who are out of the labor force. The only exception was the youth community conservation and improvement project in the Coastal Bend area. Hence, YEDPA made little headway in addressing the problem of youth unemployment in these communities. The best that can be said is that YEDPA may have prevented a bad situation from becoming worse.

Coordination with the Private Sector

In its first year, the least successful aspect of YEDPA was its relation with the private sector. In El Paso, serious problems with unions during the start-up period delayed the beginning of a number of projects. An accommodation was eventually reached, and the prime sponsor has steered clear of areas of potential conflict. In general, all of the prime sponsors are grateful that the unions are not more interested in YEDPA in their localities.

The prime sponsors regret that they were unable to arouse more interest in the business community. One plan-

ner cynically observed that private industry was not interested in youth problems unless public relations opportunities were involved. In the Coastal Bend area, an on-the-job training program with private industry was very unsuccessful. Business firms simply were not interested in youths under age 18. The GI Forum's veterans outreach program, which operated the on-the-job training program, blamed the schools for the poor preparation of many youths for jobs. Many youths reacted poorly to the routine of regular work and the job requirements of private employers. Many employers apparently were impatient with the youths and expected too much too soon. Nonetheless, the program was funded again for a second year, and officials believe that they are now more aware of the need for counseling and follow-up services for participants. In Albuquerque, the limited experience with on-the-job training for youth during the first year met similar difficulties, and the training program has been discontinued. Whether the new private sector initiative program of CETA will develop in such a way as to include youths remains to be seen.

In El Paso, a promising new twist for private-sector involvement in the programs administered by the El Paso Independent School District did begin in early 1979. Under its youth employment and training program effort, the school system has launched a new program at the vocational-technical school. The students will attend regular classes part of the day and will work at job sites for the rest of the day. A total of twenty-four participants will work at private-sector sites in occupations for which they have already indicated a preference. The implicit objective is to place the students permanently after they graduate. This program is not considered on-the-job training but rather career exploration. The participants will have to attend a special class for job skills and job habits, and they will receive two academic credits (on the quarter system) and will receive an allowance equal to the federal minimum wage for the hours they work.

The only other private-sector program in the three prime sponsor areas is in Albuquerque, where the entire allocation for the youth employment and training program has been used to set up a special vocational education program with the local hospitality industry. This program also involves career exploration. Students are paid a training allowance, they attend a regular class in job preparation and self-awareness, and they receive academic credit for their work experience. Officials of the program also hope that some of the participants will become permanent employees in the industry after they graduate.

Interim Assessment

YEDPA has served two important purposes in these communities: it has demonstrated the complexity of the youth labor market and has shown the necessity for specially directed programs for youths.

The prime sponsors are now more knowledgeable about the influences on youth employment patterns than they were when the act was passed. They understand more clearly the forces that affect both the demand and the

supply of youth employment. Most private employers, for example, are not interested in hiring youths who are under 18. This reluctance is the result of the youth's poor preparation for jobs and partly the result of such institutional obstacles as insurance costs, special driver's license requirements, and the minimum wage. The prime sponsors now believe that anytime an employer is given a choice between an adult and a youth for a full-time job, the adult will be chosen. Many employers are also bothered by differences in life styles and young people's lack of serious commitment to the job market.

Prime sponsors have become sensitive to the social problems that are especially severe among economically disadvantaged youths: broken homes, alcoholism (of parents or the youths themselves), drugs, child abuse, child neglect, and incest. School officials, of course, have long known of these factors and have stressed the importance of supportive services for youths more than prime sponsors have in the past. School officials have also pressed for the involvement of such other community institutions as halfway houses, welfare agencies, and juvenile courts in the effort to bring youths back to school. YEDPA has forced the prime sponsors and their staffs to recognize the merits of these considerations. Also, through the youth employment and training program, prime sponsors have been able to assist a number of needy people who were not technically eligible in the past under CETA.

Because youths are in a transition stage from dependence on their families to independence as working adults, they often require special program initiatives and special links with other societal institutions. The focus of CETA on job placement per se is clearly at odds with the concern in the schools that education and training should be the primary considerations for those under age 18. Jobs and work experience may be necessary components of youth programs, but most educators believe that they should be subsidiary to the primary goals. Prime sponsors seem to be adjusting to this perspective, but it may take more time for policymakers in both Congress and the Department of Labor to be convinced.

The greatest impact of YEDPA has been on the school systems. YEDPA has funded school programs that discourage youths from dropping out, has supported the movement to pay more attention to vocational education and job training, has stressed the importance of personal and career counseling for youths, and has supported non-traditional educational approaches to reach youths who would otherwise be ignored. YEDPA has helped the movement for alternative schools, classes for school-aged parents, night schools, preparation for a general equivalency diploma, and cooperative education. Although all of these programs existed in some form earlier, YEDPA has given them quite a boost.

Youth programs spawn a number of intangible benefits that are not easily quantified—such as the development of good work habits and a reduction in school dropouts. Over the long run, these benefits may be more important than a reduction in youth unemployment or the creation of new jobs for youths.